

## Regulator keeping watch on energy debt

The state's energy regulator says it will be keeping a close eye on energy debt with [new data](#) showing more Victorians are receiving payment assistance due to the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the latest data from the Essential Services Commission, calls to energy retailers for help have dropped to their lowest level since April, but the number of small businesses and households on some form of payment assistance and the level of energy debt have increased.

Acting energy director Aaron Yuen says average electricity debt for businesses receiving help increased 30 per cent and household debt increased up to 11 per cent between April and August.

"We will be keeping a close eye on the arrears of Victorian energy customers over the coming months as Federal Government assistance changes," he said.

Mr Yuen says Victorian energy retailers must offer customers support under the commission's [payment difficulty framework](#) which has some of the best consumer protections in Australia.

"Under our framework, retailers must offer assistance to anyone who asks regardless of their financial circumstances.

"Anyone who has lost a job, is behind on their energy bills and cannot pay for their ongoing energy use must also be offered a six month hold on their energy debt," he said.

The commission's latest [report on the Victorian energy market](#) shows signs [recent energy reforms](#) are making a difference. The report shows:

- the price of residential electricity offers fell by 0.5 to 3 per cent and gas offers fell by 1.1 to 3.3 per cent between April and June 2020 (p.14)
- the price of small business electricity offers fell by 0.6 to 3.4 per cent and gas offers fell by 0.1 to 0.8 per cent (p.17)
- the average cost of not meeting pay-on time discounts has fallen by 66 per cent for electricity and 38 per cent for gas over the past year (p. 16).

You can [take control of your energy bills](#) with support services being funded by the Victorian Government. There are [free webinars](#) online or call [1800 830 029](#) to find a cheaper offer or get advice on making your home more energy efficient. You can also call the [National Debt Helpline](#) on 1800 007 007 for financial counselling.

**For further information call: Clayton Bennett, Senior Communication Adviser, 0447 933 140**

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